

## Research Summary

### A Latrobe Community Wellbeing Barometer

April 2025

#### Analysis aims

Our aim was to create a Community Wellbeing Barometer to monitor changes in community wellbeing in Latrobe. We aimed for the barometer to be a practical, updatable and replicable monitoring tool that could be easily used by various agencies and groups in Latrobe, and in other areas, to support regional planning and policy initiatives.

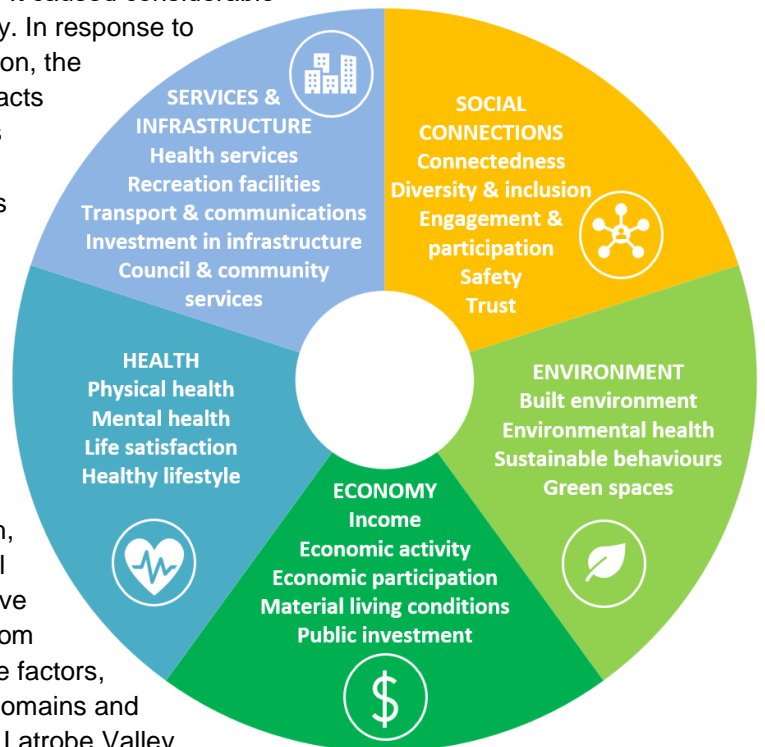


#### Meet the team

Susan Yell  
Matthew Carroll  
Michelle Duffy  
Damian Morgan  
Larissa Walker

## Background

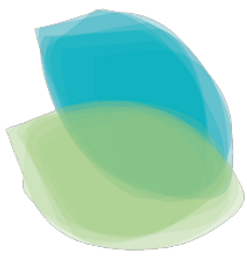
The fire in the Morwell open cut brown coal mine adjacent to the Hazelwood Power Station blanketed the town of Morwell and the surrounding area in smoke and ash for six weeks in February and March 2014. The smoke event was recognised as one of the most significant air quality incidents in Victoria’s history. It caused considerable community concern within Morwell and the broader community. In response to these concerns, and following extensive community consultation, the Hazelwood Health Study was established to examine the impacts of the mine fire. The Study involves multiple research streams targeting different health outcomes and different vulnerable groups. The Community Wellbeing Stream researches various aspects of community wellbeing in the Latrobe Valley, including the factors that contribute to current and future changes in wellbeing.



## What we did

We identified five key domains of community wellbeing (health, economy, environment, services and infrastructure, and social connections), each driven by multiple factors. After an extensive search and consultation process, we selected 68 measures from 19 publicly available data sources that related to each of these factors, which we combined to monitor changes over time in the five domains and in overall community wellbeing. By comparing our findings for Latrobe Valley with those for Victoria, we were able to examine local level differences.

Hazelwood Health Study website: <http://www.hazelwoodhealthstudy.org.au/>



# Hazelwood HEALTH STUDY

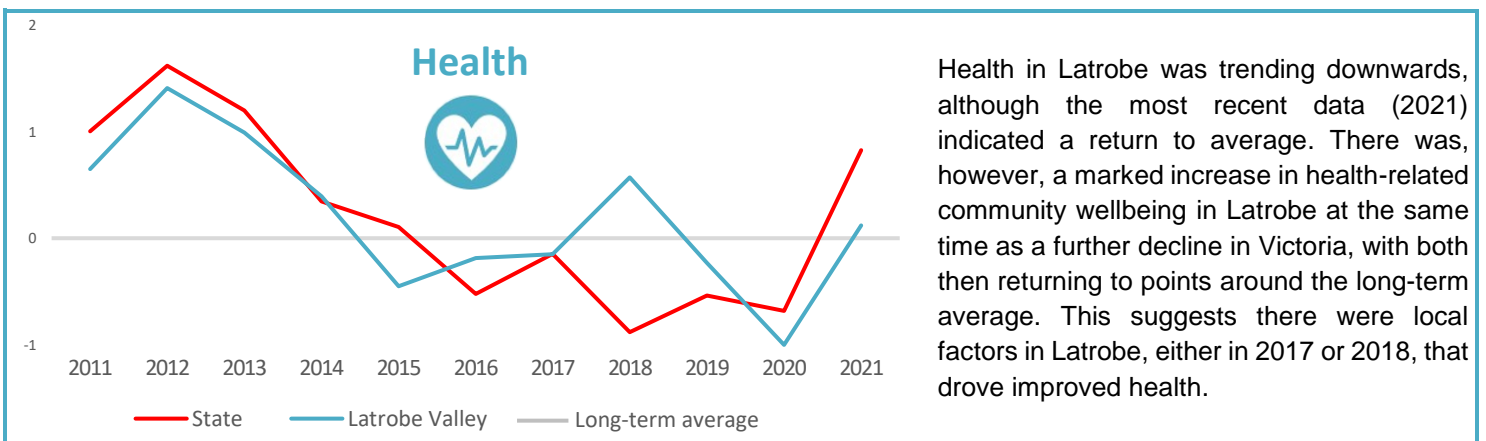
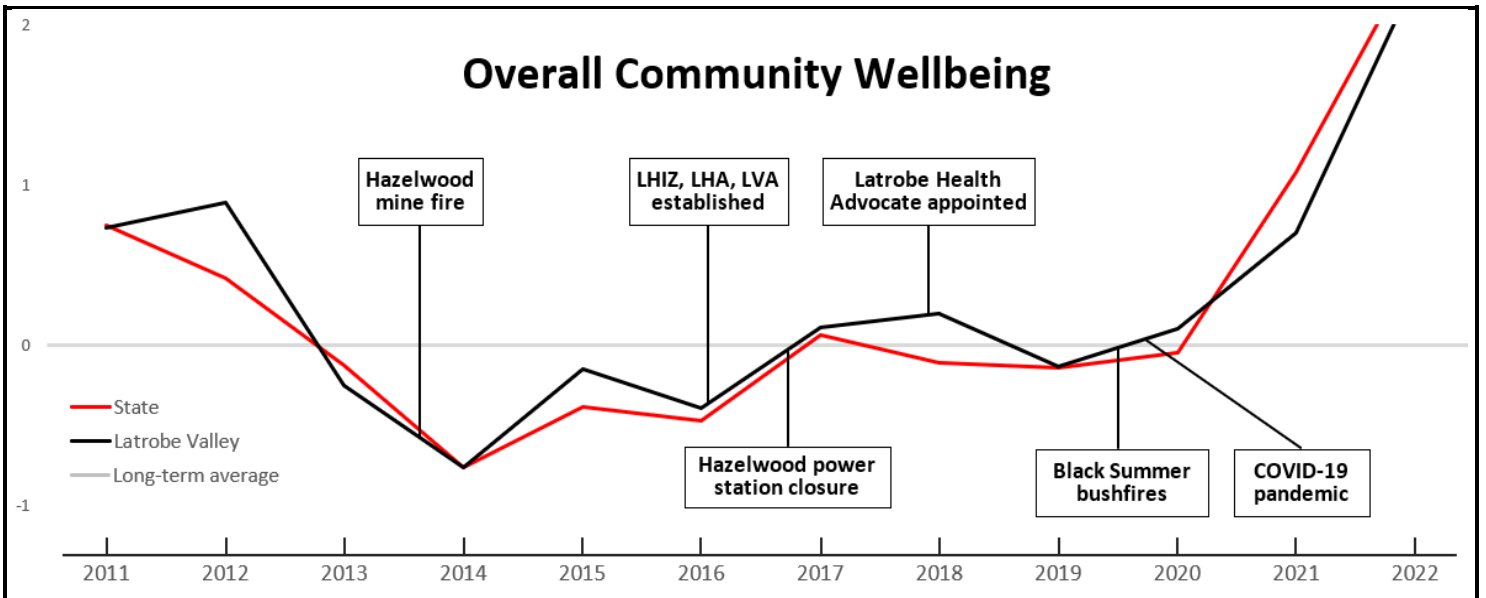


## What we found



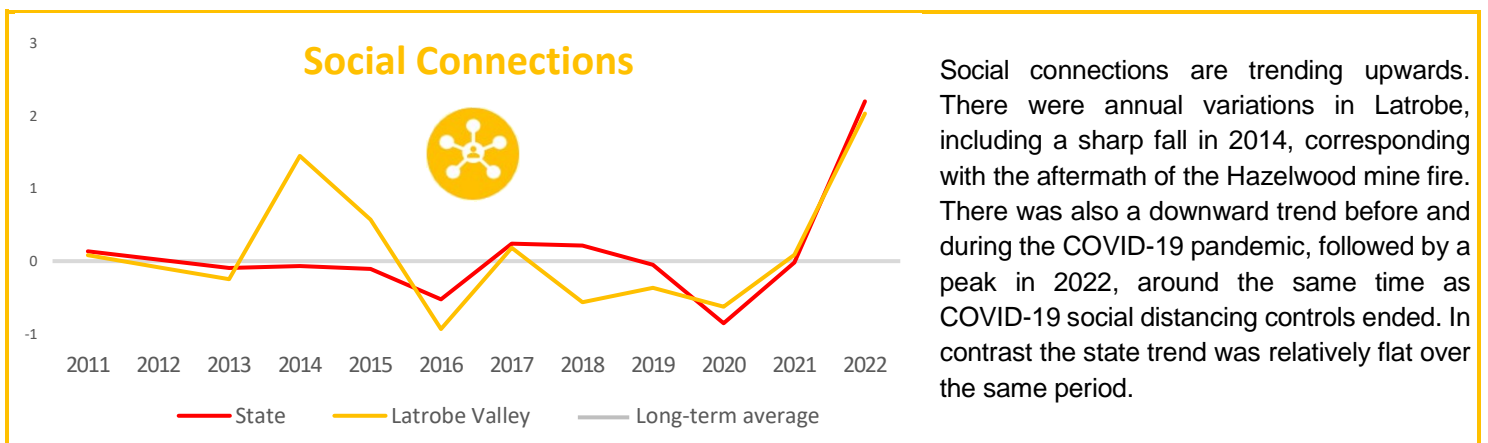
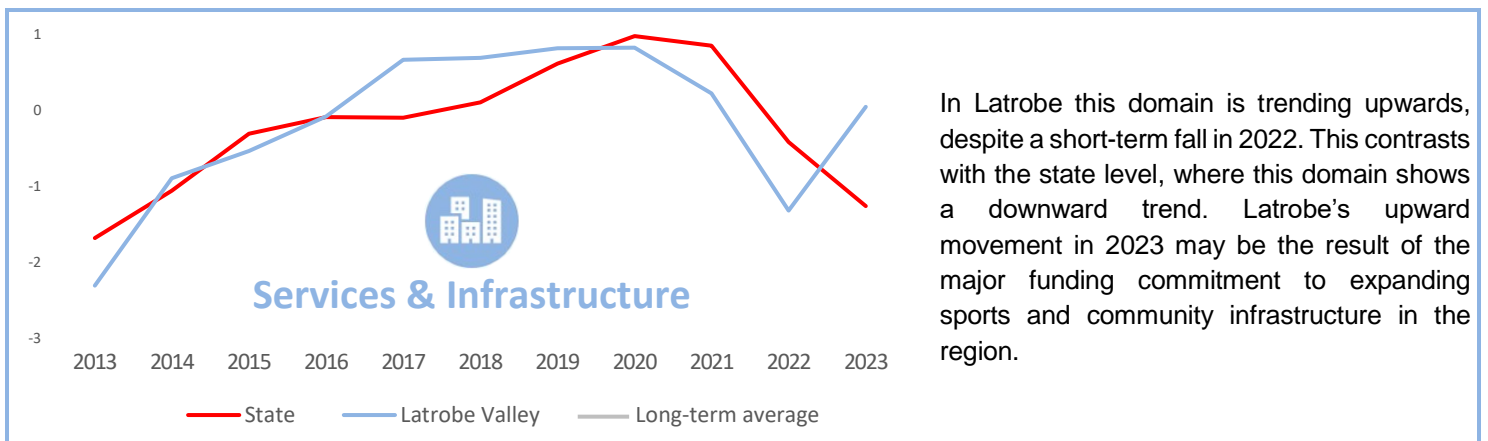
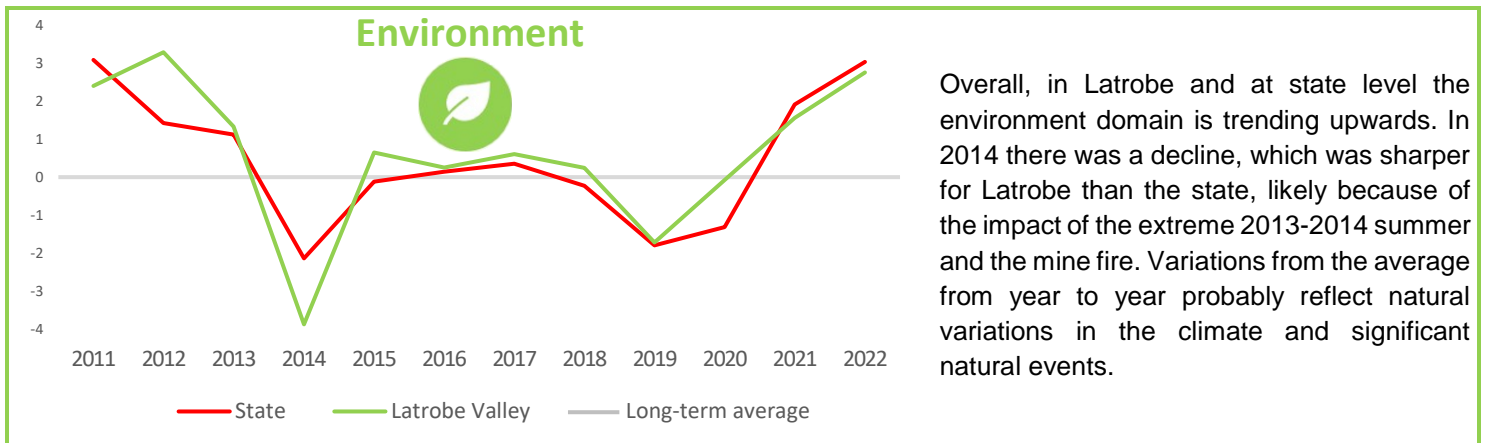
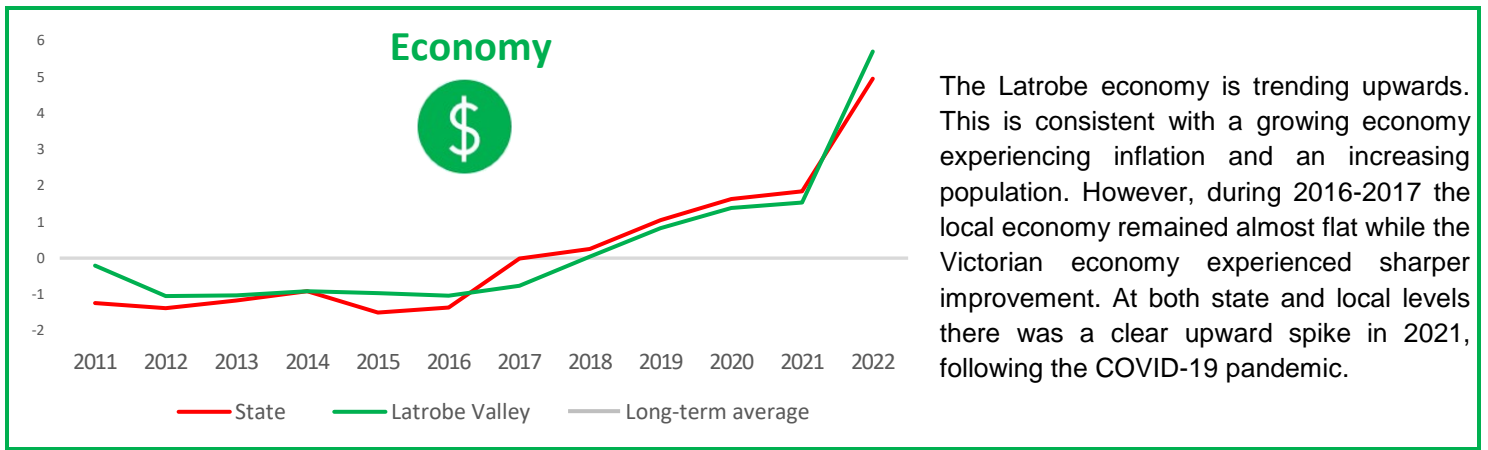
The graphs below depict the change over time in overall community wellbeing and in each of the five domains of community wellbeing, comparing Latrobe Valley with the entire state. The horizontal lines represent the long-term average, and so a score below zero means that Latrobe (or the state) was below average in that domain at that time.

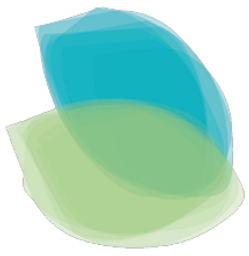
The overall community wellbeing trend shows wellbeing falling, then rising. In Latrobe, short-term falls in wellbeing in some domains coincide with the Hazelwood mine fire, Hazelwood Power Station closure, Black Summer bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, initiatives like the Latrobe Health Assembly, Latrobe Valley Authority and appointment of the Latrobe Health Advocate coincide with a rising overall trend. Where the graphs comparing Latrobe with the state of Victoria follow similar trends, this could show that state-level policy settings are shaping local outcomes. The value of a regional barometer is that it shows points where local outcomes differ from the state, indicating that local factors are shaping wellbeing.



Health in Latrobe was trending downwards, although the most recent data (2021) indicated a return to average. There was, however, a marked increase in health-related community wellbeing in Latrobe at the same time as a further decline in Victoria, with both then returning to points around the long-term average. This suggests there were local factors in Latrobe, either in 2017 or 2018, that drove improved health.

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## Considerations

We endeavoured to capture all data used for the barometer accurately, but there may be instances where data were adjusted or re-released after we completed data collection and analysis. Importantly, we used only publicly available data that met specific criteria, which means there are some gaps. Also, the barometer is limited to monitoring community-level wellbeing and so will not reflect the diversity and individual experiences of community members.

Although limitations were evident, compiling ongoing and consistent data using a community wellbeing barometer allows for trends to be identified. Further, the barometer can offer insights into how major events may influence or change community wellbeing.



## Where to from here

We would like to share our findings on wellbeing with the community and organisations, and work with them to identify ways of further developing the barometer. We would seek to use our findings to support advocacy in addressing gaps in publicly available data and to promote use of the barometer model for planning and policy initiatives in Latrobe, in other regions, and for other topic areas.

A detailed report describing these findings can be found at:

<https://hazelwoodhealthstudy.org.au/study-findings/study-reports>

The HHS is led by Monash University with collaborators from the Menzies Institute for Medical Research, Federation University, The University of Adelaide, University of Newcastle, James Cook University and CSIRO.

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